

BEST gets five mini AC buses

The 21-seater procured on wet lease; to run on feeder routes

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The Brihanmumbai Electric Supply and Transport (BEST) Undertaking got its first set of mini air-conditioned (AC) buses on Monday. The five 21-seater buses, which were procured on wet lease, were inducted by Shiv Sena chief Uddhav Thackeray on Monday.

Mr. Thackeray commended officials of the BEST and the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) for bringing the undertaking out of its financial mess. "It is not just the livelihoods of the BEST employees that were at stake but all those who use the service daily would have suffered the loss had the BEST not survived. Today, they have got these buses on wet lease, but this does not mean that the BEST employees will lose their jobs," he said.

In a reference to Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's statement regarding Ola and Uber contributing to a decline in the auto industry, Mr. Thackeray said the ride-sharing apps had had an impact on the BEST as well. "The BEST is now in a position to compete with Ola and Uber with its new AC buses."

BEST general manager Surendrakumar Bagde said 25 more AC buses will be ad-



Shiv Sena chief Uddhav Thackeray at the induction of mini AC buses on Monday. • EMMANUAL YOGINI

ded by the end of the month, and they aim to add around 1,000 buses by January 2020. He claimed that after the reduction in fares, the BEST ferries nearly 32 lakh passengers on an average every day.

BEST officials said the registration of the five mini AC buses is under way and they should be operational within a week. The buses are manufactured by Force Motors, who have been given a contract to provide 400 buses. The buses will be operated by Shri Krupa Services Pvt. Ltd, who will provide the drivers and maintain the vehicles. The buses are being planned to be run on feeder routes, which will provide last-mile connectivity from railway and Metro stations.

Municipal Commissioner

Praveen Pardeshi said wet leasing will reduce the operational costs per bus. He also said the corporation will pay the BEST ₹400 crore towards clearing the pending loans and removing the monthly interest burden from the undertaking.

"We will also pay ₹100 crore towards the operational losses made by the undertaking. Our fear is not the loss. The fear is inefficient loss. We should aim to reach the least loss and then keep subsidising it," he said.

Mr. Pardeshi said they are planning to formally introduce dedicated bus lanes across the city and are in discussions with the parking authority. "Already the average speed of buses has gone up by 5-10% after implementing the parking policy. Our aim is to increase it to 20%."